P11 / Democratic Resistance: Domestic and International Policy Strategies

Topic : COMPARATIVE PUBLIC POLICY

Chair : Rachel Riedl (Cornell University, US)

Second Chair : Dan Slater (University of Michigan)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Domestic and foreign policy are powerful tools to arrest democratic backsliding and support democratic resilience. The panel emphasizes policy responses in the following domains in moments of democratic backsliding: legislative and executive lawmaking and candidate eligibility rules, judicial appointments and domains of jurisprudence, regulatory agencies (particularly tax, audit, and communications/ media sectors) of the state, political party registration, candidate selection, and competitive activity policies, labor and private sector rights and regulations, and foreign intervention rules. To create opportunities for democratic resistance and recovery, policy interventions will generally focus on the subsectors within the ”democracy, rights and governance” frameworks. The panel participants will specify the theory of change which connects the pathways of democratic backsliding with the policy programming responses (foreign and/or domestic) that identifies how these changes can support democratic goals and practice. The general framework of the panel suggests that these theories of change lie in the power of vertical responsibility (the masses putting limits and accountability on the rulers, either through elections or contentious politics), horizontal accountability (checks and balances of other institutional sites of power), and diagonal accountability (formal civil society and media audits and investigations) (Riedl et al 2024). Such policy interventions have the potential to recover or even deepen democracy in the face of such specific threats to civil liberties and political rights.

Existing research has tended to focus on either the drivers of democratic erosion, or the strategies that key actors – such as judiciaries and civil society groups – can employ to resist this process (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; Waldner and Lust 2018; Arriola, Rakner, and van de Walle 2022; Elischer and Lawrance 2022). This panel will identify the policy responses and which policy actors/ institutional sites can undertake such reforms given the particular pathways of democratic backsliding underway.

CALL FOR PAPERS

We welcome papers that use empirical assessments of policy responses to democratic backsliding, to assess the mechanisms of policy reform and their relative efficacy across different contexts.

? How should we conceptualise or categorize the policy menu of programming responses to democratic backsliding, and how do they relate to theories of change for democratic resistance and sources of resilience?

? What, if anything, is distinctive about policy targeted to address democratic backsliding in cases that have eroded to competitive autocracies, versus those that remain (limited) democracies ?

? What policies can pre-emptively support democracies to more resilient to future authoritarian threats?

? What particular policy challenges and opportunities do episodes of re-democratisation generate, given the tensions inherent in pro-democracy coalitions, governance expectations, and a need to reform institutionalized sites of autocratic capture?

? How does democratic backsliding and resistance relate to other intersecting policy priorities, such as reducing corruption and enhancing state capacity?

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Session 1

Thursday, July 3rd 10:15 to 12:15 (SME-F4)

Democratic Resilience in Lithuania: Perspectives of Academic to Civic Communities

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Vytautas Valentinavicius (Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania)

Egle Vaidelyte (Kaunas University of Technology)

Democratic resilience, the ability of democratic systems, institutions, political actors, and citizens to withstand and respond to internal and external challenges, has never been more critical in times of geopolitical instability, particularly in regions facing hybrid threats and democratic backsliding. Merkel and Lührmann (2021) argue that the more democracies exhibit resilience at all four levels of the political system: the political community, institutions (including universities and research performing organizations), actors, and citizens, the less vulnerable they are to crises, now and in the future. Research on citizenship (Martini & Quaranta, 2020) underscores that active civic participation strengthens decision-making processes, producing outcomes that benefit society at large. Furthermore, informed and engaged citizens are more likely to collaborate, make rational decisions, and hold governments accountable, all of which contribute to a society's ability to endure and recover from crises. In an era of increasing digital misinformation, the ability to critically assess information, understand scientific data, and use technology responsibly has become a crucial component of democratic resilience (Doyle et al., 2020; Yacoubian, 2017).

In the broader academic discourse, social resilience refers to a community's ability to absorb, adapt to, and recover from adverse events (Alessi et al., 2020; Dewaele & Lucas, 2022). A resilient society values cultural diversity and promotes the political, economic, and social inclusion of all individuals, thus strengthening social cohesion (Norris et al., 2008). Comparative research suggests that key drivers of social resilience include civic participation, social capital, inclusive governance, and citizens' capacity to critically engage with social issues within their local context (Carmen et al., 2022). Universities are also might take an active role in building resilience through political and administrative science study programmes, science communication and citizen science (Levac et. al., 2018). However, existing studies often fail to explore how democratic and social resilience interact in contexts facing high geopolitical pressure and external threats.

This study employs a mixed methods approach to examine how Lithuanian citizens perceive and engage with democracy, civic participation, and societal resilience in the face of growing domestic and international challenges. The quantitative component analyses public attitudes toward democratic institutions, political engagement, and citizen science, offering insight into how these factors contribute to overall democratic resilience. The qualitative component examines the extent to which local governments facilitate or impede civic participation, evaluating the responsiveness of institutions to grassroots engagement.

Initial outcomes suggest a significant enhancement in public pride concerning Lithuania's democratic achievements. Nonetheless, notwithstanding this favorable development, persistent apprehensions about societal readiness for crises, such as military threats, political instability, and disinformation campaigns, continue to exist. The results imply that although institutional trust has seen improvements, there remains a fragile public confidence in the society's capacity to effectively mobilize during times of crisis. This study seeks to delineate the principal factors impacting democratic resilience and to formulate policy recommendations aimed at augmenting institutional trust, university role in enhancing community resistance to external and internal threats, and bolstering civic participation amidst contemporary challenges.

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Multilateral decentralized cooperation for bettering democratic resilience. The case of the European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA) and the LDAs.v

Francesca Gelli (Università Iuav di Venezia)

The paper presents an interesting case-experiment in the challenge to redemocratize and strengthen democratic resilience in countries shaken by wars, authoritarian regimes, and periods of crisis for the quality of democracy: the European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA) and its operational network of 17 Local Democracy Agencies (LDAs). Established in the 1990s by the initiative of the Council of Europe, the first LDAs were active in the Balkans in 1993 as part of the Democratization Table to support the recovery of civil society and municipalities after the conflict; ALDA has worked since 1999 as an umbrella organization for coordinating LDAs' activities. In thirty years of activity, ALDA and LDAs have acted as key stakeholders and strategic partners in building local democratic resilience in the target territories of intervention. The focus of our analysis is on their innovative method of decentralized multilateral cooperation, which is based on ongoing local and international partnership between local governments, civil society associations, NGOs, universities and research centres that share projects and initiatives, in many policy areas and on central issues, to foster citizen participation, mobilise civil society organizations, and strengthen the administrative and governance capacities of local institutions. Over the years their role has expanded, mediating with the institutions of the European Union and spreading a bottom-up approach, which gives importance to cities and territories (the reference is to the different vision of construction of Europe, of the European Council and the EU), stimulating mutual learning with those territories where democracy is stable; but there is also an awareness that the quality of democracy must be constantly nurtured and improved. Today ALDA is a platform for dialogue and cooperation that brings together over 300 partners, including several Mediterranean countries; LDAs were also established in Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Moldova. The study offers a diachronic comparison, taking advantage of previous research on LDAs carried out in the Balkans between 2002-2006 and ongoing research commissioned by ALDA itself to evaluate the impact of ALDA's actions in target territories, with the goals of strengthening local capacities for democratic resilience and better understanding conditions that facilitate successful redemocratization.

Examining Educational Development in Taiwan: A Reform Phase Analysis

Warangkana Lin (I-Shou University)

Taiwan's education system has undergone a significant transformation shaped by global trends and local socio-political contexts. This study examines Taiwan's educational development and reforms, analyzing education policies and identifying priorities across distinct phases. Specifically, it investigates how Taiwan's education policies have evolved in response to shifting global paradigms and domestic socio-political forces. These phases are explored within the broader context of liberal, neoliberal, and post-neoliberal paradigms. It analyzes over 500 policy documents from 1929 to 2023, including acts, specific laws, presidential decrees, and K-12 school-related regulations. The analysis applies a ten-dimension policy framework encompassing access, evaluation, finance, governance, equity, teachers, resources, curriculum, improvement, and learning standards, derived from the integration of Overbey's (2023) framework and OECD Education GPS. Data coding, conducted using MAXQDA with inter-rater reliability check, identified three reform phases: establishment and early access (1928–1993), regulation and equal access (1994–2009), and consolidation and inclusivity (2010–2024). The findings underscore the significant influence of public advocacy, particularly from parents and scholars, on reform initiatives, culminating in milestones such as the enactment of the Educational Fundamental Law in 1999 and repeated amendments

to key legislation, including the Private School Law (16 times), the Primary and Junior School Act (16 times), and the Teacher Education Act (15 times). While global trends of post-neoliberalism emphasize increased public reinvestment and school autonomy with accountability, Taiwan’s reforms have instead prioritized heightened regulation and state oversight. This divergence underscores the intricate interplay between Taiwan’s centralized Confucian government and its democratic evolution. The study contributes to understanding the process of policy reform and state resilience, offering insights into how democratic societies with centralized traditions, such as Taiwan, navigate the challenges of sustaining democratic principles amidst evolving global and local constraints.

Keywords: Reform, Confucian government, post-neoliberalism, policy, Taiwan, democratic society

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Reigniting enthusiasm?Polarization and political participation in the U.S

Muxi Li (Nankai University)

Political participation is a fundamental component of democratic governance, and its fluctuations are often regarded as a key indicator of the effectiveness of democratic institutions. This study aims to analyze the mechanisms through which party polarization drives institutional political participation, with a particular focus on the dynamic changes in electoral participation. Since the 2016 election cycle, Western democracies, particularly the United States, have experienced a notable resurgence in institutional political participation, as evidenced by the steady rise in voter turnout for both presidential and midterm elections. This trend stands in stark contrast to the persistently low electoral participation in several Western European countries, challenging the theoretical validity of existing explanations that attribute participation trends to the proliferation of internet technologies (technological dimension) and the rise of populism (ideological dimension) as universal factors.

This study focuses on party polarization as a key explanatory variable and constructs a "polarization-participation" theoretical model to systematically examine the mechanisms underlying the resurgence of institutional political participation in contemporary democracies. Utilizing a multidimensional dataset from the U.S. federal election cycles between 2012 and 2024, the research investigates the dynamic relationship between the intensity of party polarization and institutional political participation. The findings reveal that: (1) party polarization exerts a structural incentive effect on institutional participation by shaping voters' sense of political efficacy and issue salience perception; (2) within the context of polarization, technological and ideological variables, which have been central to existing explanatory frameworks, primarily function as moderating factors rather than independent explanatory variables.

This study seeks to deepen our understanding of the factors influencing institutional political participation.